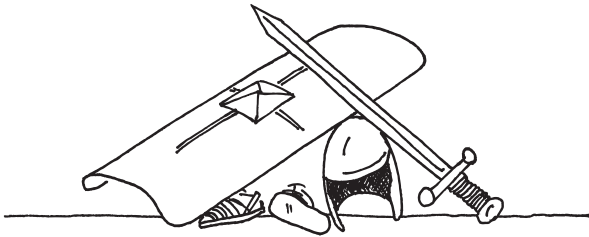


Chapter One:

Take a Stand!



Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

(Eph. 6:10–11)

Some people reject the military side of the Christian life. I appreciate those who want to see peace on earth; however, as long as sin exists in this world, the battle between Satan's forces and

God's people will rage on. Anyone who chooses to be on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ will face severe opposition from Satan and his followers. And those who refuse to fight will fall in the heat of the battle.

The Bible frequently uses images of war to depict the Christian life. Paul exhorted Timothy to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ (see 2 Tim. 2:3). In fact, the first picture our Lord gave of the Church was a military one. He told the disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against the onslaughts of the Church (see Matt. 16:18). In ancient times a common military tactic used by armies was to break down the gate of an enemy's fortress with a battering ram. Once inside, they could then destroy the opposing army. Likewise, Jesus told us that Satan and his forces are not able to withstand, or prevent, the onward march of Christianity. The Church *will* win the war.

The Soldier's Readiness

The Christian life is not a playground – it's a battleground and whether we like it or not, every Christian is called to be a soldier and to 'fight

the good fight' (1 Tim. 6:12). No good soldier enters a battle without being fully prepared and protected. Likewise, God does not expect us to go to war unarmed. He has given us the armour and weapons we need for the fight, and He expects us to use them. Ephesians 6 tells us:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand (vv. 10–13).

What is the armour of God that we are to wear? Paul went on to list the different parts of the armour that we are to put on by faith – the belt^a

^aThis is 'girdle' in the original 1986 version of this book, but has been modernised to 'belt' throughout.

of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (see vv. 14–17).

While putting on this armour is important, our *posture* in battle is even more vital. Notice the emphasis Paul placed on the word ‘stand’ in this passage. We are told to ‘stand firm’ (v. 14), fully clothed in God’s armour, so that we can take a ‘stand against the devil’s schemes’ (v. 11) and ‘so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground’ (v. 13). Having done all this, we will then be able to stand (see v. 13).

Why this emphasis on standing? Many people misunderstand the purpose of the Christian’s armour. The purpose of the armour is to help us stand so we don’t lose the ground that Jesus has won for us. In fact, the entire book of Ephesians talks about our posture as Christians. The first three chapters describe the wealth that we have inherited through faith in Christ. Because of His grace, we have the privilege of being *seated* with Christ in the heavenly realms (see Eph. 2:6) and of sharing in His riches.

In chapter 4 Paul moves from talking about our wealth in Christ to our *walk* in Christ: ‘I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called’ (v. 1, NKJV). Because today we have the privilege of sitting with Christ on His throne, we are able to walk in the will of God and according to the calling He has given us. This means that we are able to ‘no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk’ (v. 17, NKJV) but instead should ‘walk in love’ (5:2, NKJV) ‘as children of light’ (v. 8, NKJV), being careful to ‘walk circumspectly’ (v. 15, NKJV).

Anyone who is seated with Christ on His throne and is walking with Him, revealing Him to an evil world, is going to be attacked by the Enemy. Spiritual *warfare* goes hand in hand with our wealth and our walk. The privilege of partaking in the riches of Christ’s grace and glory as part of His Body is not without its responsibilities. We should not expect to *sit* and *walk* with Him unless we are also willing to *stand* for Him in the battle against Satan. He has already won the war for us – it’s our responsibility to hold on to His victory.

It's important to remember that the purpose of our Christian armour is not for use in gaining new territory. Of course, we are involved in a conquest. When Jesus said, 'the gates of Hades will not overcome it' (Matt. 16:18), He was talking about the movement of His army, the Church, in gaining territory and claiming the spoil. But even as we are conquering, we must remember that we do not fight *for* victory but *from* victory. Christ has already won the victory for us, and we have already entered into our spiritual inheritance in Him. Thus, our role in the battle with the Devil is that of claiming and holding on to the territory and inheritance won for us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

We find a beautiful illustration of this truth in the book of Joshua. The Children of Israel were preparing to enter the Promised Land – their inheritance. God told Joshua, 'Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them – to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses' (Josh. 1:2–3). In other words God was saying, 'Start walking. You already have the inheritance:

now claim it by faith.’ While the Israelites had to fight the inhabitants of the land, they did not do it to conquer new territory but merely to claim the inheritance that God has already given them.

However, knowing the land was theirs and claiming it by faith was not enough. The Children of Israel also needed to have strength and courage. Three times in Joshua 1 we find the Lord telling Joshua to ‘be strong and courageous’ (vv. 6,9: see also v. 7). In telling the people about God’s commands, Joshua gave them the same exhortation (see v. 18). Likewise, Paul gave us the same instructions for our spiritual warfare: ‘Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power’ (Eph. 6:10).

Having strength and courage is important not only for the battles but also for the so-called times of peace. It is at these times, when we have let down our defences, that Satan attacks the hardest and gains the most victories. This is what happened to the Israelites. Under Joshua’s leadership, they conquered the land and claimed their inheritance. But a new generation came along that didn’t appreciate their inheritance and didn’t know the Lord as they should. Their

strength and courage waned. As a result, they could not stand against their enemies, and they lost their inheritance.

Judges 2 tells us, 'After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel' (v. 10). Have you ever wondered how the people could forget the Lord and what He had done for them so quickly? It may be that the older generation had not kept the Lord's command to teach their children the Law given to them in the wilderness and to relate to them how He had brought them out of Egypt (see Deut. 6:6–25). Likewise, our responsibility as parents today is to teach the Word of God to our children so they might teach it to our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren.

It is also possible that the older generation taught the younger one but that the new generation didn't want to listen. They were content in the land and didn't think they needed God anymore. As a result, the Lord permitted them to be conquered by various nations – the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, the Moabites, the